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Soil Conservation Service

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# 'Indigo' silky dogwood



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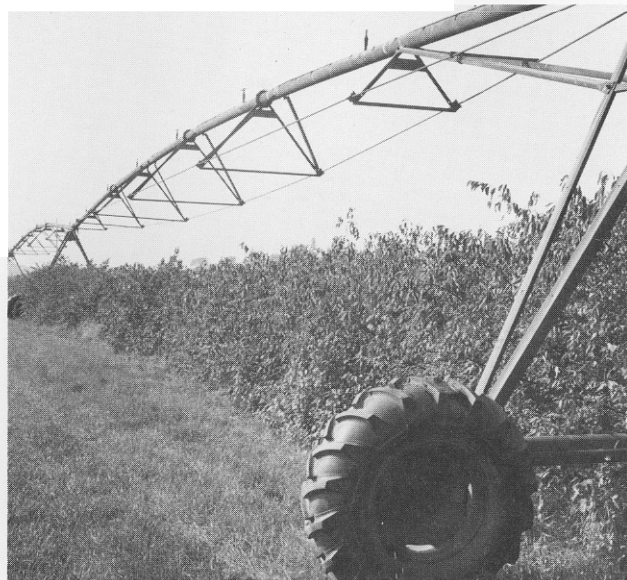
'Indigo' silky dogwood (*Cornus amomum* Mill.) is a dense, multistemmed woody plant. Indigo is especially useful for single-row windbreaks in fields with center pivot irrigation systems because it grows low enough that the spray bar can pass over it.

Indigo can also be used in multirow field windbreaks and farmstead windbreaks. Stems and leaves are desirable deer browse, and the fruit is eaten by upland game birds and many songbirds. Silky dogwood is also useful for beautification and landscaping.

The cultivar Indigo silky dogwood was released in 1982 by the Soil Conservation Service (SCS) in cooperation with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources.

### Description

Indigo is a spreading shrub that can grow 10 feet tall. The stems are red when young but turn reddish brown and gray as they mature.



*Indigo silky dogwood in a single-row windbreak in cropland under center-pivot irrigation.*

Indigo has yellowish-white flowers that bloom in mid-June. It produces an abundant crop of fruit, which ripens in September. The fruit is pale to dark blue and about  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch in diameter.

Silky dogwood can be distinguished from other blue-fruited species of dogwood by the dark-brown pith in 1- and 2-year-old stems. In other blue-fruited dogwoods the pith is white.

### Adaptation

Indigo silky dogwood seed were first collected in 1961 from plants at Rose Lake Wildlife Research Station in Clinton County, Michigan. Indigo has been evaluated in 20 states, particularly in the Lake States, where it has performed well. Its natural range of climatic adaptation is shown on the map.

Indigo is adapted to a wide range of soils and soil textures, but it grows best in moist soil. It is adapted to



*Flowers of Indigo bloom for about 2 weeks in early summer*

soils that are somewhat poorly drained to well drained and have a pH of 5.0 to 7.0. It is moderately shade tolerant but is not drought tolerant.

### Establishment

For help in planning windbreaks of Indigo, contact the local office of SCS or the Cooperative Extension Service.

Establish plantings of Indigo from seedlings. Two-year-old seedlings are suitable for mechanical planting. One-year-old seedlings can be planted by hand, but survival may be low because of their small root systems.

Follow the planting dates and spacing recommendations for shrubs in your area, but space the plants no more than 6 feet apart. Plant Indigo seedlings in the spring as soon as the ground thaws. If you plant them much later than the average frost-free date, their establishment may be poor unless a moist site is chosen or supplemental water is applied.



*Fruit of Indigo is about  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch in diameter and grows in clusters.*

To ensure establishment, control weeds mechanically for the first few years. Once Indigo is established, you can use approved herbicides for effective weed control. Several effective herbicides are available, but be sure to follow the manufacturer's directions carefully. Consult Extension personnel for help in selecting herbicides.

Silky dogwood is susceptible to infestations of scurfy scale and occasional webworm attacks. Also, excessive deer browsing may retard growth.

### Propagation

Indigo seedlings are easily propagated from cleaned seed or freshly collected fruit. Commercial nurseries use open-pollinated seed. The seed or fruit is sown in nursery beds in the fall.

### Availability

Indigo planting stock is generally available from commercial nurseries in the Midwest. The Soil Conservation Service maintains breeder seed at its Rose Lake Plant Materials Center in East Lansing, Michigan.

For more information on where to buy Indigo or how to use and plant it, contact your local SCS office. It is listed in your telephone directory under "U.S. Government, Department of Agriculture, Soil Conservation Service."

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